

Beat the Summer Movie Hype

Like the blazing summer sun, the media and marketing blitz surrounding Hollywood's hottest season can be searing.

Event movies are trumpeted as the biggest thing to come along in the history of the planet—then quickly forgotten in favor of the next weekend's biggest thing to come along in the history of the planet. (*Pearl Harbor*, where have you gone?)

Amidst all this hot air, it's hard for regular filmgoers—who used to be able to enjoy a summer movie for the movie's sake—not to get burned. As protection, here are some tips that can serve as cinematic sunscreen.

Focus on the films

Consider what accompanies the average blockbuster-to-be these days: Endless magazine covers, countless TV commercials, Web-based promotional campaigns, fast-food tie-ins, and Top 40 music from the soundtrack are just a few of the elements in a studio's omnipresent marketing campaign. Like Los Angeles' smog, the promotion of a major summer film hangs in the air so heavily we can hardly breathe.

From the studio's perspective, a movie's only worth is its ability to lure you into the theaters. So slick trailers, big-name stars, and a catchy title are more valuable than the actual film. Publicists act as carnival barkers—they'll shout until they're hoarse just to get you into the tent, even though what you see turns out to be Austin Powers in *Goldmember*.

All of this hoopla happens before we even get to see the movie, which is treated as an afterthought. Last summer, Americans lived and breathed *Men in*

Black 2 for months before it arrived. No wonder I was sick of the picture before I even saw a single frame.

Avoiding such a situation requires blinders, so to speak. Even if you're excited about June's *The Hulk*, a comic-book adaptation from eclectic auteur Ang Lee, limit how many magazine puff pieces about it you read—or at least the number of Hulk shakes you buy at your local burger joint. This way, when the movie finally arrives, you'll still be eager to see it—which was the point in the first place.

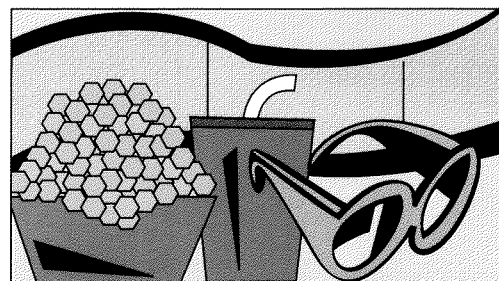
Ignore the box office

Box-office reports are rarely a good judge of a movie's quality, especially during the summer. When a film debuts in first place—or, as we often hear, breaks financial records—more often than not it's an indication of the marketing campaign's success and little else.

By touting first-place standings, the studios are essentially telling you that almost everyone else in America went to see their movie last weekend except you. The implication is that if you don't race out to catch up with their film, you'll be hopelessly out of it. But really, does anyone feel any shame for skipping last year's *Scooby-Doo*?

Trust friends and critics

Who, then, should you listen to? In the summer, word of mouth is crucial. If you can resist seeing a movie on opening weekend, track down someone who couldn't and get his reaction. He'll certainly be more honest than the studio



publicists and entertainment “journalists” who have been buzzing in your head.

Beyond that, find a critic you trust—not one of those elitists who thinks only subtitled movies are worth seeing, but someone who recognizes a popular work of art when he or she sees one. Even in the mindless days of summer, they exist, as the critical and popular success *Spider-Man* demonstrated last year.

Lower your expectations

That said, the ratio of good movies to bad ones in June, July, and August isn't very encouraging. If summer is a showcase for Hollywood, it's also somewhat of a dumping ground, the time to unleash endless titles on us in hopes that one will stick.

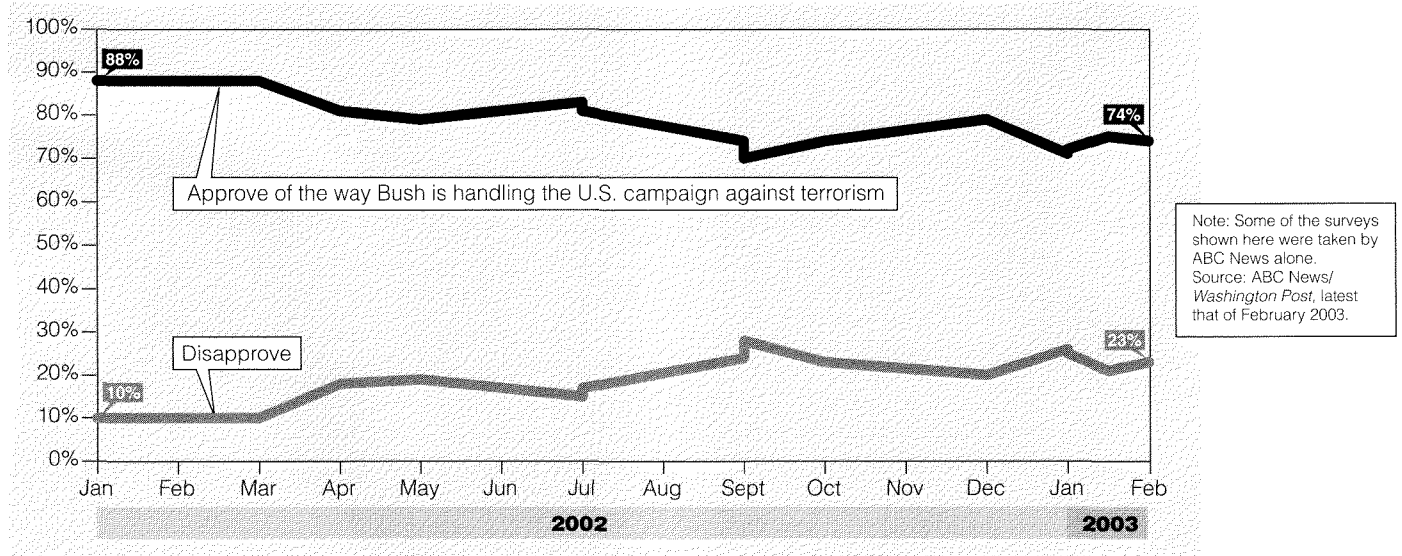
One way to enjoy what gets tossed your way is not to expect too much. Instead of great expectations, the summer should be a time of pleasant surprises. When *Charlie's Angels* came out a few years back, who knew it would not only be bearable, but even a lot of fun? Of course, this doesn't mean that you should rush for the theater when *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* opens in June. Something tells me lowered expectations—along with each of the summer-movie tips above—will be essential for this one.

—Josh Larsen

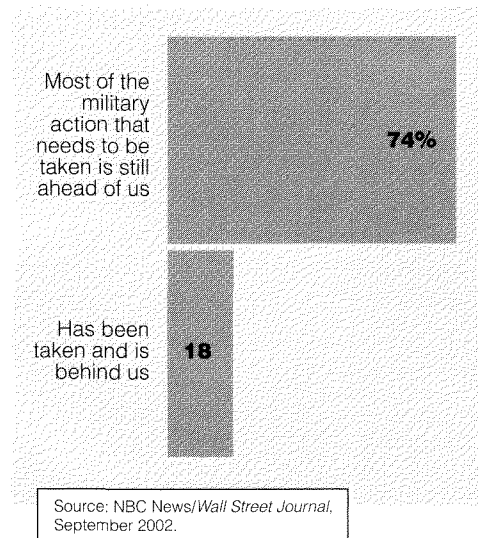
The War on Terror: An Update

President Bush continues to receive high marks from Americans on handling the war on terror. The recognition that this will be a long and difficult struggle has set in. Large majorities believe that most of the military action that will need to be taken in the war on terror is still ahead of us. Today, around four in ten say neither side is winning this war. Of the remainder, more say the U.S. is prevailing than say the terrorists are.

Question: Do you...?



Question: When it comes to taking military action in the war against terrorism, do you think...?



Question: Who do you think...?

